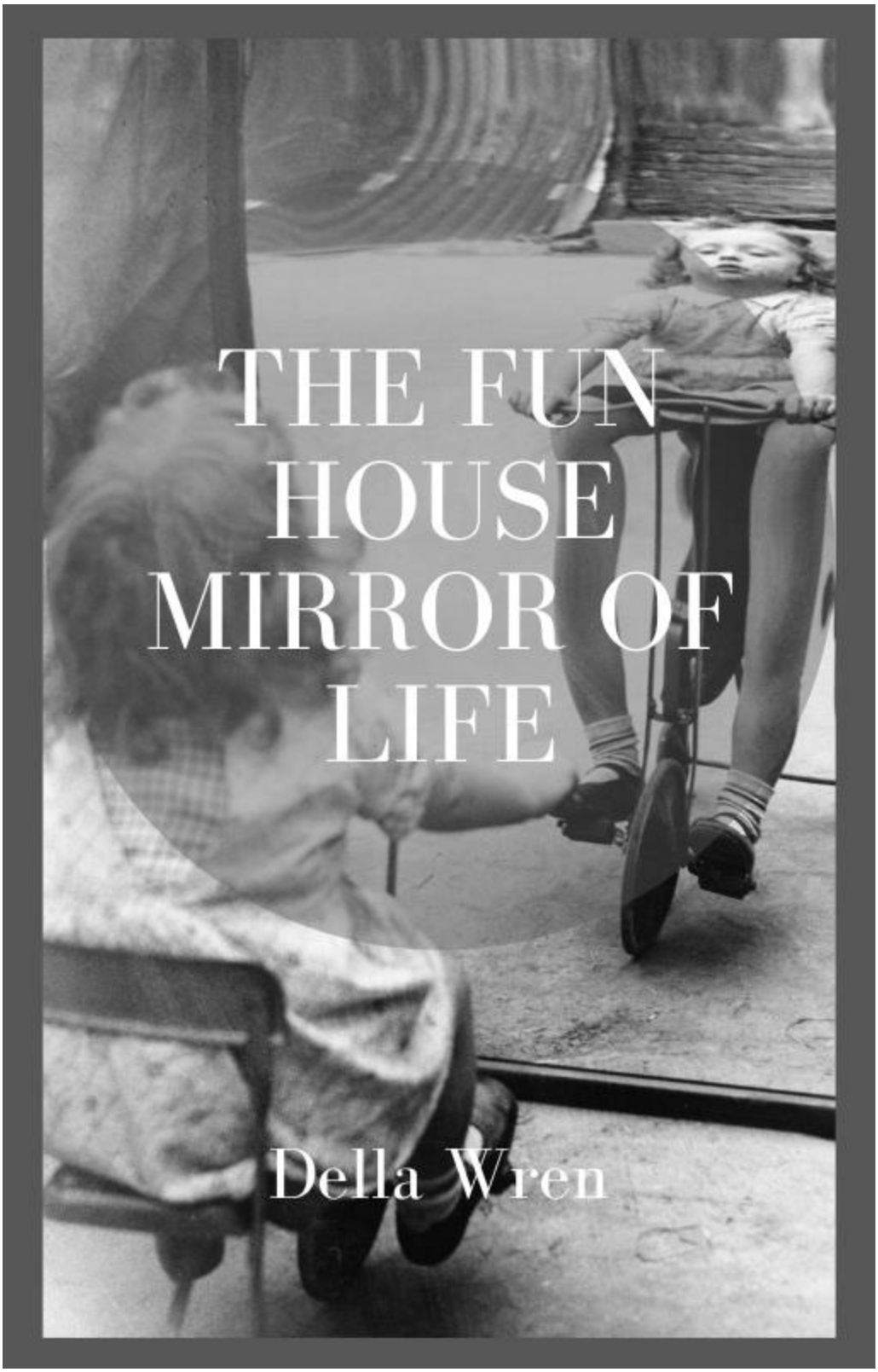
THE FUN HOUSE MIRROR OF LIFE
Della Wren

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To all the fun house mirrors I've ever looked in.
The distortion was both real and imagined.
Thank you.

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Chapter One

The Fun House Mirror of Life

The Scenario

Some spiritual leaders offer the idea that everything is reflecting back to you something within yourself. When you take that a little too deep, it creates confusion because suddenly everything in your experience is offering you a reflection including the guy that cut you off in traffic, the mosquito that bit you, and the battery dying on your cell phone. This becomes a problem because what we're taught simultaneously is that we're creating our own realities. So if you're creating your own reality and all the crazy around you is a reflection of something within you, then you must be one messed up person, right?

So let's question what we should be picking up versus the random stuff in life

that we don't really have much control over. What's important and what's not, and how to tell the difference. Let's get started.

Which Reality to Use

Reality is talking to you. It is showing you what you need to work on within yourself, but not the way we sometimes get taught it is in spiritual circles. There is this very all or nothing approach to how to interpret reality that causes a lot of confusion. If we take on absolutely everything we happen to be a witness to, it creates a lot of unnecessary pain and confusion. It starts to make you think you're really messed up, but you're not.

What you need to remember is that you're not in control of the world around you. You can take some indirect control through managing yourself within the experience and making conscious choices, but you really don't have direct control

over much of what happens around you. That means that those things aren't a reflection of anything within you. They are just part of the fabric that makes up your reality.

The things that I pay the most attention to personally are my relationships with people and things. These are the things that I'm directly interacting with and I either have direct control over or indirect control over them. These are the things that I'm making conscious choices about on a regular basis.

I don't have control over the traffic jam. I can't control the guy that cut me off, even indirectly. I may have the power to energetically interact with the mosquito and get it to stop biting me, but I'm not interested in that right now so I'm not going to bother worrying about it.

I only take on the reflections from things that are important to me and I leave the rest alone. That resolves the confusion and makes it easier for me to figure out what to pay attention to. It also limits how much I have to pay attention to and that matters because in case you haven't noticed, life is busy and there's a lot going on. It's important to know what you need to or want to pay attention to so that you limit the amount you have to take on.

Once you understand what you need to be paying attention to, you can leave the rest alone and not worry about what it's offering you. It actually helps you see what you have control over and what you don't. It clarifies that idea for you which makes the whole process easier in the long run because then you're not trying to

control everything anymore. That matters because that thing where we try to control the entire world gets frustrating really fast and makes healing ourselves really challenging.

Now that we've established what we're paying attention to, let's sort out the story we're telling about what we're paying attention to.

The Story You Tell

There's reality and then there is the story you tell about reality. Those things are different - very, very different. The reality was that somebody said something that hurt your feelings. The story was that they were trying to hurt you, they made you feel awful, they didn't respect your boundaries and they lied to you. They were being malicious and cruel. They were out to get you. You should never talk to them again.

Which one sounds more fun to you? Which one has more color? Which one is more exciting? Which story takes longer to tell? Which one is true?

Reality is boring. It's the story of he said / she said. It's the story of experience of this thing happening and that thing happening. You add in the pain, the color, the

drama, and the excitement. You add in all the other stuff that makes reality not so boring. You add in all the things that cause you pain.

Yes, the person said something and your immediate reaction was the emotion of pain. You were hurt. Okay, that's fair. Everything after that is in your head. Your only job is to manage the emotion that showed up immediately after the comment was made. That's it. That's all you have to be able to do, just manage that original emotion. Where did it come from? Why is it there? What's it hooked to in my previous experience? What did it trigger? What's the inner healing work that's coming from this experience?

Having the experience of somebody saying something you don't like offers you an opportunity to heal yourself. You miss that most of the time because you're busy telling stories that offer a lot of extra pain, color, and drama. Self-mastery teaches that we get control over the mind so that it doesn't make up the extra drama, color, and pain. From there, we learn to manage the emotion that we feel so that it stays contained to the experience we had. We don't expand beyond that.

The emotion becomes a clue as to what pain we're hanging onto within ourselves. It's a hint that there is a trigger there. If there was no trigger, you wouldn't have been bothered by the comment. Staying out of the story means we don't get distracted. That's what gives us the room to heal and do the work.

I totally get the distraction because it's exciting and dramatic. I get why it's easy to get tied up in it. I call it Shiny Object Syndrome. The color and drama are exciting

and so that becomes the thing you want to pay attention to. The mind distracted you from dealing with the pain because if you heal the pain it offers an unknown. Who will I be without the pain? The mind doesn't like unknowns because its job is to keep your human body safe. It does that by making sure you never do anything that would put you in an unknown experience, and that includes healing yourself.

Your mind has identified with the pain of your previous experience. It identified with it because that pain is familiar. It knows that pain. Because it knows the pain it wants to stay there. Known pain is better than unknown pain. But staying there keeps you in pain. It keeps you stuck. The only way out of that is to get okay with the unknown, which means you have to stop being distracted by the stories your mind throws at you.

It's not just painful comments from other people that cause us to make up stories. We do this with everything - every single experience we have every single day comes with a story. I remember when I decided to write my first book. I was scared of the time it would take to write the book. I was scared of not selling any books. I was scared of what to say in the book. I was scared of the delay in payments from Amazon. I was scared of the entire process and because I was scared of the whole thing, I made up all kinds of stories about it. I made up the story that writing the book was distracting me from being able to be online and make money. I made up the story that book writing took too long. I made up the story that the book wasn't good enough. I made up the story of failure. I created my own pain. Reality didn't do any of

that to me. I did it to myself.

The result of those stories was that the book was short, only 63 pages, and written very quickly, within a couple weeks because I was terrified of the amount of time it would take to write and I cut the book short.

What did I learn from that experience? I've written many more books since then and they've gradually increased in length. My last book was 214 pages long. I can write a full-length book and not be so distracted by it that I can't continue my online presence. It turns out I can walk and chew gum at the same time! Who knew?!

How did I learn that? By challenging the story I was telling. How did I challenge the story? By allowing myself to have the experience. I kept writing. I kept pushing. I kept trying to understand what the problem was in my own head. I knew the problem wasn't outside of me, even though it's fun to blame the outside world for everything. I just had to figure out what the problem was within me and that took a long time. I had to go around that loop a bunch before I figured it out.

What was the problem? My insecurity around money and instability. The problem was another story I was telling about money, that also wasn't true by the way. As I dug my way through all these stories that were all tied together what it came down to was a sense of powerlessness and lack of control over my own life. My perception was that I had to do things a certain way because life was making me. I was using the story I was telling about what was going on around me as proof of that. The thing is that none of it was true. It was all in my head.

The truth of pretty much every experience I've had up until now is that my perception of lack of control caused me to make up all kinds of stories about every aspect of my life. Each of those stories wound together to create a reality that was based on a lie I was telling myself about my life. What was the lie? That I had no power over anything, including myself. The lie that I was completely powerless kept me stuck in painful stories for most of my 48 years of life. It's only very recently that I've been able to unwind the stories enough to be able to start taking my power back and start creating the reality I actually want.

I've had painful experiences just like everybody else. My life was not pain-free by any stretch of the imagination. The stories I told about those experiences were far more painful than the experiences themselves. That is exactly why I keep talking about the stories and how they keep you stuck, because I know that my stories kept me stuck for a very long time. They don't keep me stuck anymore because I learned how to question them. What I'm trying to offer you is that same skill. Question the story of the mind. It's not true.

The Fun House Mirror

The stories put a kink in our perception. They make us see things that aren't there. They distort reality just like a fun house mirror does. When you look in a fun house mirror at the carnival, you expect to see the distortion. You're actively questioning what that particular mirror is going to make you look like. You look in the mirror willingly and you know that it's not an accurate representation of your physical shape. Do you see that the stories you tell create the same funky distortions in your perception as the fun house mirror does to your physical shape?

When you blame the other person for hurting your feelings, that creates a distortion in your perception. The story becomes about what the other person did to

you. What did the other person actually do? Say words. Were they nice words? No, they weren't. Were they intending to hurt you? Maybe or maybe not. You really don't have the answer to that question. Only the person that said the words knows that for sure. Does the person have control over how you feel? You want to say yes to this question because that's the story of blame. But let's tell the truth - the other person does not have control over how you feel, regardless of what they say. You had an emotional response to their words, but that emotional response was under your control, not theirs.

The blame makes you distort where your point of control is because blame makes you put the point of control in the other person. If they don't say those words then I don't have to feel bad. Is that helpful to you? No. Life becomes very frustrating when you distort scenarios like this in such a way that it forces you to try to control the actions and words of other people in order to be okay within yourself.

What's actually happening? The distortion is our justification of the pain. We need a reason for the pain and so we tell a story of blame to make up a reason for the pain. Why can't you just say, "That hurt me and I need to figure out what that's about."? Because that's the truth. Those words hurt you and now your job is to figure out why they hurt you without the story.

I told so many stories like this that I completely gave up my power. I put all of my power outside of me. It caused me to not be able to make my own choices or live my life the way I wanted to. My perception was completely distorted by the stories of

blame, shame, guilt, and victimization I was telling. Anytime somebody would say something that seemed potentially critical of what I was doing, I heard "change it". It didn't matter what it was. It didn't matter how minor the criticism was. The minute that criticism was verbalized it meant I had to change what I was doing.

The distortion in my perception was thick. People were questioning my choices. People question each other's choices all the time and I turned that into a victim story that put me at the mercy of everybody else's criticisms and questioning.

As I worked through understanding my life experience and how I'd ended up where I had, I started to realize that my interpretation was bad. I was in fact interpreting my life through a fun house mirror. I had distorted my reality so completely that it rendered me unable to function in my own life.

It turns out those criticisms and questions weren't to get me to change anything. They were just questions. It turns out those people weren't trying to control everything I said and did. They were just concerned about what I was doing. It turns out that those people weren't offering me pain, I was creating it in my own head. Does that mean that nothing bad ever happened? No. There were still some crunchy experiences in there but it wasn't the experiences that were actually painful that were the problem. It was all the ones that weren't painful but that I made painful in my head that became the problem.

If I hadn't distorted my reality so extensively, I'd say my life wasn't all that bad. I was bullied as a kid and yes, it turned into depression and mental health issues,

which I dealt with. But then as I moved into my 20's, 30's and even 40's, life wasn't really that awful. My pain was self-created and so if I take all that out of there, there isn't much pain left. This is one of the reasons why I say sometimes that I'm not a trauma coach. My life wasn't traumatic the way it is for some people. All the pain I created in my head sure made it seem traumatic and it definitely offered me some experiences that ended up being traumatic, but life without those things wasn't traumatic at all.

When I filter out all the stuff that was self-created due to wonky perception, there isn't much left. What's important in that realization is that it gave me my power back. I was such a good creator that I created all kinds of painful experiences for myself. Look at the power I had to create my own pain. If I have that much power and ability to create my own pain, how much power and ability do I have to create my own happiness?

I don't have a hammer. I don't take out the hammer and beat myself up for all the pain I created in my life. I don't tell the story of blame. I don't need to justify the pain that I felt. Those things just were. My perception was the way it was. All of those things brought me here, which I'm eternally grateful for. Could I have made that discovery painful for myself? Sure. I can blame myself for creating pain. But how does that help? What does that do for me? It adds a layer of pain as a way of justifying the experience. By learning to leave the experience alone, I don't have to justify it. I did what I did. What happened is what happened. I can't change it, so I need to figure out

how to get okay with it. The easiest way to get okay with it is to stop myself from telling the story of blame.

Every single person creates these distortions in their perception. Those distortions affect not just the original experience, but also every other experience you have after it. It affects your choices. It affects how you feel. It affects how you see the world. The more tied into the story you get, the more difficult it becomes to get out of it later. It took me years to unwind the crazy stories I was telling. It took me years to see how I'd distorted my reality by adding a layer of pain that didn't exist. We all do this at one point or another. My life has become about pointing that out so that it can be managed or healed. We don't have to do this, but in order to stop doing something, we have to be aware of it to begin with.

So how can you begin to unwind the story from the experience? What does that look like? Let's talk about it.

Unwinding The Story from The Experience

Once your perception is all wonky, it can take a bit to sort it back out. It took me years to unwind all the stories that I was telling. It's important to remember though that the bulk of it unravels pretty fast because you start to see the overriding theme in your perception. Once you figure out the filter, the rest is just about how you show up in the world.

When I realized that my powerlessness was mostly self-created, that unwound a whole pile of things really fast. It made my experience make sense immediately. That was most of the work right there. The next job was to figure out how I was still living from that perception through my behavior. That part wasn't necessarily harder, it was

just more picky. It required more self-awareness. It required me to pay more attention to what was happening and how I was reacting to what was happening.

I used my experience to begin to figure out my behavior. I would have an experience and there would be some sort of a reaction or response to it. After the experience, I would then sit down and figure out why I reacted the way I did. Was there a story there? Was there a trigger? Was there pain there for me that I self-created? What was the experience offering me?

This wasn't an instant fix by any means. I would have to have the same experience multiple times to figure it out completely. But over a period of time, I started to understand how my behavior was affecting my experience. As I began to shift my behavior, my experience also shifted. Things changed because I changed how I showed up.

The hardest part in this process is dealing with the fear in the background. The question of who you'll be once you do all this comes up. It's a question that doesn't have an answer. The mind can't conceive of itself in any other way than what it is in the present moment. To ask the mind who it will be in some future experience just offers the mind an unknown. When the mind perceives an unknown it fills it in with pain as a means of protecting you from some unknown pain in the future. You have to stay out of that question because it's not going to help you move forward.

The idea is to get okay where we are and only question how we're affecting the present experience. Again, we can't offer ourselves the fear of some unknown

outcome in the present moment either. We have to get past this idea that we need control. That's a hard thing to get over. We think that by doing what we're doing we are controlling the experience and I suppose in some sense, a predictable outcome offers a feeling of control. But is it really control or is that just an illusion because you know the outcome this time?

When you have the same experience on repeat and you react the same way every time, the outcome becomes pretty predictable. Is that control? No. It's an illusion that gets created via repetition. If we stop repeating our reaction, the outcome has the potential to change. That's the fear because now suddenly the outcome is unknown and the mind doesn't like that. The mind will tell you to repeat the same reaction because it's predictable and so it feels safer, but that's not necessarily helpful.

One of the biggest leaps you'll take as you work through this process is to begin changing some of those predictable reactions to the repetitive experiences you have in your life. This was a terrifying prospect for me because what it meant I had to do was to do nothing. I had to sit on my hands and watch the world happen around me. I had to stop "fixing" the problem. I put "fixing" in quotation marks because I wasn't really fixing anything, I was perpetuating the problem. My reaction was the thing that put the problem on repeat. It was only once I did nothing that the problem stopped happening.

My mind made up every crazy story you could possibly imagine. The drama in my head was award-winning to say the least. Did any of that actually happen? No. My

mind created pain to defend me from the potential for more unknown pain.

Sitting on my hands doing nothing was harder than any of the active work I did to heal ever was. My perception of control was in doing things. If I wasn't responding or reacting that meant I was giving up what little control I thought I had. And believe me, I didn't think I had very much control to begin with. Not doing anything made that perception 1000 times worse.

Why am I telling you this story? Because I want you to find these spots in your own life. I want you to see that it's possible to unwind the stories you're telling. I want you to see that you can find the filter that's distorting your perception. It's actually a very logical process. It's not deep emotional healing at all. It might trigger some emotion, but that's not what we're trying to work with.

What we want to do is understand the experience from a higher perspective. We want to get out of the forest and into the helicopter (one of my favorite analogies!). The reason we want to do that is so that we can see the experience more clearly. We get so tied up in the emotion of it, the drama of it, the justification of it, that we can't see how we're creating our own reality, how we're perpetuating our problems in our own experience. We don't see how we're giving up our power or the little bit of control we do have over what happens. We get stuck trying to identify twigs and leaves instead of identifying trees, paths, and things that matter in the big picture.

It's that big picture focus that we need because that's the thing that helps us

navigate. Have you ever bought a new computer screen or maybe a television set? You know how they have that plastic film across the screen? Why is that there? To protect the screen and keep it clean. If you didn't take off that film, it has the potential to make your screen seem out of focus. I'm just geeky enough to enjoy the process of removing that film. It's quite satisfying. Removing that film is a point of no return You can't put that thing back on there. Once it's off, it's done. The same is true with your perception.

Once you spot the filter and you remove it, you can't go back. There is no going back from there. You start to see everything very differently and you start to recognize that story all over the place. For me that was a rather motivating moment in time, but for you it may not be. Yes, I'm the weirdo that gets excited when I spot pain. Why? Because that means I can fix it. I know that seems nuts, but you see I've given myself the tools. I have the strategies. The opportunity to use those strategies isn't scary to me, it's exciting. I want to use what I've learned. My goal here is to help you see that you can do it too. It's not scary. It's freeing. It's an opportunity to feel better and to shift your life in positive ways so that you're not just reacting to pain.

The idea of the fun house mirror distorting your reality offers you a way to see it that's more concrete. Sometimes I think the abstract ways that we talk about energy and creation make things more scary. What am I getting myself into here? It doesn't give you a method or a process for managing it in a way that makes you feel like it's reasonably safe to try.

I don't want the process to be scary. I want you to feel like you can manage it. You can handle what happens when you look in a mirror, especially a fun house mirror. That means you can handle what happens when you take the filter off your perception and begin to see reality a little more clearly. The unraveling of the story you've been telling is not a traumatic experience. It frees you from the pretend cage you've been holding yourself hostage in for a longtime.

We think it's a dramatic shift, but the reality is at least in the moment, nothing changes. Nothing happens. It'll force you into figuring out how to navigate life differently. Maybe that's the part that's scary. Changing how you show up in the world can be a little scary. How will people react? What will people think? Will I end up alone? The short is that you'll be fine. You're not going to flip a switch and magically have everything shift. It's going to take time. You still have to unwind how that old perception was showing up in your life and what it was making you do. That's a long process.

The feeling of making a massive leap comes from the recognition that it will change things. But it doesn't acknowledge that the change is slower than we imagine it will be. You don't just wake up one day a whole new person. You change it slowly over a period of time and then eventually all those small changes add up and you do become a different person. That's not something to be scared of, it's something to be grateful for.

Stepping into your power, becoming who you are under all the pain, taking

control over your life, no longer making choices from pain, healing your relationships, and being more authentic aren't scary things. They are positive changes that take work to achieve. It's only because you don't have them right now that the mind makes up the story of fear that keeps you stuck in the pain you're currently in.

The distortion shows up as fear of who you might be or what might happen if you change how you show up. It's reasonable to question how different life will be, who will stay and who will go, and will ultimately happen as result of all the work that you do on yourself. But it's not reasonable to stay in the pain you've found yourself in because you don't have a predictable outcome to go on.

I didn't need a predictable outcome. I had a goal and that was my reason why. I didn't care what I had to do or blast through to get it, I was going to achieve that goal. Motivation was key for me and I had plenty of it. My motivation is what kept me going when it got really hard. But there was a point in time when things shifted, when I was no longer healing myself simply as a means to an end. Suddenly I wanted to do the work. I wanted to show up. I wanted to change it. I wanted to feel better. It didn't change my desire to reach my goal. The goal was held onto. It only changed how I reached the goal because now suddenly my path to the goal was also a path for my life. It became a life path I didn't know I needed. It became a way of being I didn't know I wanted. It offered me a purpose I didn't know I was missing. I ended up here completely accidentally on purpose because I made a choice to go on a journey when I didn't know what the outcome would be.

I keep encouraging you to trust it because I know that it was my trust in the journey that got me here. I know for sure that if you trust your own journey it will change your life in ways you can't imagine from where you are right now.

To do that, to go there, you have to get over the fear of change and the fear of the outcome. You have to just go on the journey and see what happens. You're just so tied into the story that you tell, your need to defend yourself from all the pain, that you can't see what life is trying to offer you. It's trying to open you up to show you what's possible, but you keep defending yourself from it. You keep waiting to have all the control you think you need. You keep waiting for the fun house mirror to somehow fix itself. It doesn't work like that. You have to decide you want it. You have to be willing to go on the journey. Nobody can do it for you. You can only decide that you're ready to do it for yourself.

While you're figuring out how to make that choice, I'm going to keep writing about how to shift the experience and change your perception. You can let go of the pain. Hopefully these little guides will help you do that.

Sending you so much love on your journey to freedom.

Della